# The Cross Examiner

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Rich Mullins is one of the rising performers in the glamorous world of contemporary Christian music. And yet, as a former CBC student, he is one of our own. The story of Rich Mullins is one of success and failure. He hailed originally from a farm just north of Richmond, Indiana, and his rise has been one of both emotional highs and lows. Before entering the music world for a career, Mullins spent six years at CBC and yet never graduated ("I had trouble picking out a major!"). During this time, he served as interim youth minister for First Christian Church in Kingsport, Tennessee, and Kentwood Christian Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Yet it was his youth ministry at Erlanger United Methodist Church in Erlanger, Kentucky, that Mullins came to the crossroads of music or ministry. However, even at the "crossroads" the choice was clear: youth ministry was his priority. "It wasn't a big deal to me," he explained. "I wasn't thinking of that [music] as a career. I was intending to be a youth minister."

However, God had something else in mind for Rich Mullins. Following an ICTHUS festival in Wilmore, Kentucky, Mullins began to realize the power of music in the lives of young people. And following God's leading, Mullins moved to Nashville, Tennessee to pursue a totally new direction as a songwriter and performer.

One day the break came when one of his songs was to be recorded by Amy Grant, who was quickly ascending to the top of the music world with her songs. That song, "Sing Your Praise to the Lord", would later help to secure Mullins a place on Grant's "Unguarded" tour as the opening act.

Yet Mullins was also cementing himself in the hearts of music lovers when he released his debut album, simply entitled, "Rich Mullins". The album, recorded on a low budget, was completed within a two month stretch. He is presently working on a new album (still untitled) which he hopes to see on the market by February.

Mullins, who lists Bruce Cockburn, Peter Gabriel, and U2 as his favorite influences, is beginning to see a lot of success come his way. And for someone who tried out for, and failed to make, CBC's Talent Night four or five times, that's not bad.

Those early years of "Talent Night" failure have now given way to Amy Grant tours and record albums. And Mullins lists several "memorable" concerts, including The Forum in Los Angeles ("really scary"), and The Omni in Atlanta, where he played the same stage as U2 ("I forgot to play the piano in one part because I had a lot of friends there and was nervous!").

Above all, however, Rich Mullins is a committed Christian. And on the eve of his benefit concert for Mark and Beth Lutz at CBC, Rich spent some time with a Cross Examiner reporter for a close-up, intimate look at the real Rich Mullins. The following are Rich's repsonses to a variety of subjects:

## On the Turning Point from Youth Minister to Musician

"I was just watching the kids (at the Ichtus festival in Wilmore, KY) and how affected they were by the music. I really felt like I had some gifts in music and at the time I just prayed 'Lord, I want to do this but I want to take the steps'. The next morning my neighbor was sick and didn't go to work and I was just playing the piano when there was a knock at the door. He wanted to know if it was me who was playing the piano and I said yes. He said, 'Well, I don't know what you do for a living but you should be in music'. So I though that was either a really weird coincidence or an answer from God. Within a week I had several people calling me."

## On His Song "Sing Your Praise to the Lord", Recorded by Amy Grant:

"It was the first song I ever had published. Beth Lutz took a tape to a convention and gave it to someone who gave it to someone who gave it to someone and it ended up at Amy's manager's office."

## On Making the Move to Nashville to Begin His Music Career:

"I made a list of all the positives and all the negatives. I did as much thinking as I could. And then I prayed, 'There are three things I really have to give up to do this and I need to know they would be replaced. When these three things line up, I will consider it a good move.' So I got down there [to Nashville] and like 'snap-snap-snap' people were saying we want you to be a part of this, and we want you to be a part of **this**, and we feel like this is an important thing for you as a writer. Within a couple of hours, all three of the reasons were covered. Once again, a very odd coincidence because I had prayed very specifically and God gave me an indication of where He wanted me to go."

## On the Contemporary Christian Music Industry:

" I think the biggest probelem is not necessarily the Christian music. The problem is that we in America trust institutions so much that we have all these other organizations doing the work of the church. And because they do this, the local body is robbed of the joy of

actually involving themselves personally. I think that a lot of people want the Christian music industry to be an evangelistic or nurturing thing. People are looking at the Christian music industry and saying, 'Feed us! Convert us! Make us what we want to be!' And that is not the job of any industry. That's the job of the church. We need to realize that it is wonderful to have songs to listen to while we are doing the housework or driving the car that are going to be positive and uplifting. I don't really listen to Christian music."

## On the Question of Rock Music in the Church:

"One real problem that we have fallen into is that we cater to our own tastes and we forget that there are other things to experience. It's like people who eat spaghetti constantly and never have an oyster or a lobster. I think it does us good to go to a church where they sing a [certain] kind of music, but I do fall into judgment myself when I say, 'Gee, if we can't have rock then I am not going to go'. If you want to go to a Christian rock concert on Thursday night to hear rock music, then you are free to go, but we don't go to church to hear rock music."

## On CBC's "Talent Night", Which He Failed to Make Several Times:

"I was allowed to play a piano duet once. And I accompanied several people. I just could never cut the mustard. I was very hurt and angry. I was going, 'You know, I could take this if the people who were in this were really excellent.' But they weren't. I don't like the idea of a talent night anyway. I was too competitive to deal with it very well."

## On the Criticism of Amy Grant:

"Don't buy her albums if you don't like her. So what if she does things you don't necessarily approve of. I am sure that God, or I, or she, or any number of people don;t approve of everything that you do. It's really nobody's business. That's between her and God and between you and God."

## On Touring with Amy Grant:

"Amy Grant is one of those people who the more I know the more I respect her. I can't think of a single minister I have met that exhibits the kind of servanthood that she does, the kind of calmness. She's very pleasant, loving, and caring"

## On His Responsibilities to Audiences:

"It is not the job of a musician to convert people. I can introduce them to Christ. But the reason I am a Christian is not because someone got up and sang a song. The reason I am a Christian is because someone loved me. We do affect people and I am glad that I affect people in a good way. But nobody can take responsibility for anybody but themselves. I feel I do have a responsibility to God and I have a responsibility to the church. My responsibility, as a musician, is to play honestly, communicate clearly, and to be faithful. If I an faithful and obedient to God than that will affect those people I come in contact with."

## On Being a Role Model to Young People:

"That's when I have a ministry. I don't really believe in 'stars'. But I think role models are good. If I should be honored enough to be looked up to, one thing I wouls want kids to see is that they are important and that if they are going to imitate me, then that's what I would want them to imitate - making other people feel important."

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